



## **Intercostal Nerve Block**

### **What is an intercostal nerve block?**

An intercostal nerve block is an injection of a steroid or other medication around the intercostal nerves that are located under each rib.

### **What is the purpose of an intercostal nerve block?**

The steroid injected reduces the inflammation and/or swelling of tissue around the intercostal nerves, in between the ribs or in the chest wall. This may in turn reduce pain, and other symptoms caused by inflammation or irritation of the intercostal nerve and surrounding structures. **Herpes zoster or shingles** pain in the chest is commonly treated with intercostal blocks. Pain around a chest scar after a chest surgery may also respond well to intercostal blocks.

### **How long does the intercostal nerve block take?**

The actual injection takes only a few minutes.

### **What is actually injected?**

The injection consists of a local anesthetic (numbing medicine) and typically a steroid medication. Sometimes alcohols, like Phenol, are injected in an effort to provide more long term relief. The decision as to use local anesthetic and a steroid versus an alcohol will be discussed with you by your doctor before the injection is performed.

### **Will the intercostal nerve block hurt?**

The procedure involves inserting a needle through skin and deeper tissues. So, there is some pain involved. However, the skin and deeper tissues are numbed with a local anesthetic using a very thin needle during the performance of the block.

### **Will I be sedated for the intercostal nerve block?**

This is optional and usually the patient's preference. There are rare instance that arise where sedating a patient is not possible, especially when the patient has other serious medical conditions the make sedation to risky.

### **How is the intercostal nerve block performed?**

The procedure is usually performed in a procedure room or operating room with the use of fluoroscopy (x-ray). The patient is placed on his/her stomach. The skin is cleaned and a local anesthetic is given. Using a very small needle and x-ray guidance, the needle is steered to the desired nerve. If there are no medical conditions preventing its use, a small amount of contrast is injected to insure proper needle placement. The medications are injected.

### **What should I do after the intercostal nerve block?**

You will need to have a driver. We advise the patient to take it easy for several hours after the procedure and not operate heavy equipment or make any major decisions for 24 hours after the procedure, especially if you were sedated. You may want to apply ice to the injected area. You can return to your usual activity the day after the procedure.



### **What are the risks and side effects of intercostal nerve blocks?**

Generally speaking, this procedure is safe. However, with any procedure there are risks, side effects and possibility of complications. The most common side effect is temporary pain at the injection site. Other uncommon risks include, but are not limited to, infection, bruising, bleeding, and worsening of symptoms and a collapsed lung. This is rare, but since the needles are in close proximity to the lung, such a side effect is possible.

### **How would I know if I had a collapsed lung?**

Because of the size of the needle used, a lung usually does not collapse quickly. It may take several hours or the better part of the day. If, after the block, a patient feels winded or cannot seem to catch his/her breathe or gasps for air, a collapsed lung should be suspected. Prompt transportation to the nearest Emergency Room and a chest x-ray can confirm the suspicion of a collapsed lung.